

**Bishop Malesic homily for funeral Mass for
New Kensington Police Officer BRIAN SHAW
NOVEMBER 22, 2017 at Mount St. Peter Church, New Kensington**

Readings

Wisdom 3:1-9

John 3:1-2

Matthew 5:1-12a

Good morning. This is a very sad day for this community.

First and foremost, I would like to express my profound sympathy to you, Stephan and Lisa (Brian's parents); Steffan (Brian's brother); Bernadine (Brian's grandmother) and Haylee (Brian's girlfriend). Please know that we are truly sorry for your loss. Please know of our love for you and our concern for you.

We are also grieving for ourselves too, because this is everyone's loss. And I know in particular this is extremely painful for everyone who worked with Brian in our police departments. We stand together in our grief. Left alone, we would fall down in despair; but together, we are trying to hold each other up. That's why we find the need to gather to pray and to support each other. And, also, it is the right thing to do in the face of something that is so very wrong.

There is a book written by M. Scott Peck that begins with the words, "Life is difficult." How true that is. How true it is for us. Our tears are multiplied because we all know that Brian's untimely death should not have happened the way it did. His death does not make much sense to us.

We scratch our heads when we remember that Brian got up last Friday, went to work, and by all accounts made a routine traffic stop and was shot. But there is a darkness out there that always wants to take away the light – and the story is told again and again of innocent

people becoming the victims of violence. Just look at the cross. Of course, it is the cross that also gives us comfort.

Still, my guess is that many of us will continue to ask the question, “Why?” But, answers do not come easy, if at all. The best we can do, and what we are asked to do, is entrust ourselves to the love and mercy of God. His plan for us is much larger than our ability to understand it.

Because, in the end, life is as mysterious as death is. What I do know, however - and this comes from the Gospel today – is that God will bless the peacemakers. And Brian was a peacemaker as well as a peacekeeper. God says in the Book of Wisdom that “The souls of the just are in the hands of God and no torment shall touch them. . . . They are in peace.” And peace is the blessing for those who seek to protect it. As hard as it may be to accept – Brian is at peace, even if right now we are not.

Brian knew - just as all men and women in blue know - that their lives might be demanded from them. It comes with the territory. Thank God there are people who are braver than I am, and I imagine, braver than many of us are. We want to thank all the men and women who serve us in law enforcement. Thank you for putting your lives on the line every day, and thank you for keeping us safe.

Thank you, Brian, for serving us – and for protecting us – and building up the community at a time when so many want to destroy it with guns, drugs and crime. You made our community a better place in which we could live, work, play and pray. Today I keep thinking of the passage from the Gospel of John where Jesus tells us: “Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Brian, you showed us that greater love on Friday night.

It seems to me, when I read and hear about Brian’s life, that the field of law enforcement was a natural outlet for his strong desire to help people. He used his position on the police force as a way to channel his kind heartedness. For, truth be told, being on the New Kensington police force was more than a job for him – it was a vocation.

What is the difference between a job and a vocation? A job is a way to make money. But a vocation is different. It is a calling – it comes from inside of someone. A vocation is discovered when you look at yourself and ask, “Why did God make me? What is my purpose in life?”

I am told that Brian knew early on that he was called to do something special and great and significant. He wanted to make sure people’s rights were upheld with justice, and he did it in a compassionate and sensitive way - with a smile. God gave him an outgoing personality, physical strength, intelligence, good judgement, passion and stick-to-itiveness that are needed to be successful in law enforcement. It was his calling to protect us, help us to laugh, and lift us up.

He could look at himself in a mirror, dressed in his uniform, wearing his officer’s badge and say – this – this is my purpose. This is why God made me. Every day was a joy for him because every day he was doing what he was made to do. And he died doing what he loved. That is a vocation.

He was born on December 30, 1991. It was a happy day for his parents, I’m sure. But more importantly for us in the Church, he was baptized on April 19, 1992 just down the road at St. Joseph’s Church. That was the day when God announced to the entire world that Brian was his son too – he was a child of God. As St. John said in our second reading: “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet, so we are.” And so was Brian. We give thanks to God – for it was God who loved Brian from this life to the next last Friday. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, we have that same expectation for all of us who believe. Because life is ultimately a journey that does not end with death.

The candle at the head of Brian’s casket represents the light of Christ, the love of God, who is leading the way for him. Yes, even now, Jesus, the light, is leading Brian through the valley of the shadow of death to those green pastures of repose. And, yes, as strong as this community is here, there is a place that is better than here – that is the place where Brian is now and where we hope to be someday. How do we get there? I know of only one way: Jesus is that way.

I also know that Brian was not alone during a few of his final moments. Jesus was with him. And so were several others – a neighbor and several first responders who tried desperately to save him and comfort him. They were good Samaritans who came to help Brian, just as he himself had helped so many others.

In the end, Brian's life made a real difference for us. That's why this Church is filled with mourners who are remembering a life well lived and honoring a man who gave of himself – and who gave himself – so that others might live. I thank God for the gift of Brian, and I pray for more like him.

Was he perfect? No person is. And at this funeral Mass we also pray for the forgiveness of his sins. That's what Jesus came to do – to forgive us. He also came to conquer evil and told us to "Have no fear." The funeral of this young man gives us a sense of urgency to continue where he left off, to confront the ills of our society, the drugs in our neighborhoods, and the violence that has infiltrated our streets. We don't look for revenge, nor would Jesus expect that from us. But we do look for justice and peace. That is something to strive for. And that is what we pray for and will continue to work for.

Again, my condolences to you his family, his friends and colleagues and to all who mourn his loss. You will continue to be in my personal prayers, and I assure you of the prayers of many throughout this region and beyond.

May he rest in peace.

May Officer Shaw's prayers help to protect us from above.